

REGAINING A KINGDOM

Domestic Rulership, That Was Sometime
Abdicated, Resumed Through Stratagem

By CATHARINE MATHEWS

"It has come to this," said I, and I flung a tulip-bulb over the wall in my excitement, "that we don't amount to a row of pins in our own house!"

"Oh, hush, they'll hear you!" said Delice, looking behind her apprehensively. "I know it amounts to oppression, but what can we do?"

"Do?" said I. "Do them; they have done us long enough! You and I presumably married and went to house-keeping for our own comfort and happiness, and with that end in view we surrounded ourselves with all the things we liked; and just look at the state things are in now! Where is our automobile? John and Elinor have gone over to the Country Club in it. What is the matter with our playing tennis? David and Jeannette are on the court morning, noon and night. Why can't we enjoy ourselves peaceably in the house? Burgess and Laura are gracefully draped all over it. And you and I have to sneak out into the back garden like a couple of convicts for fear of blighting some budding romance."

"But they are your sisters, dear," said Delice, gently soothing the back of my head, which she claims is the seat of my temper, with her sunburned little hand—"they are your sisters, and it is so—so desirable that they should marry and be as happy as we are!"

"As we would be if we ever got the chance!" said I savagely, and I sent two hyacinths flying after the tulip. "I tell you, Delice, it has got to stop! Those six people have been in possession long enough; and little Willie is about to become strenuous and make a change."

Delice has not that entire confidence in me which we are duly instructed is so desirable in the matrimonial estate, or she would not have put up the petition of "Oh, Billy, don't be rude to them!" in the heartfelt accents that she did.

I was not rude. Delice need not have feared. I decided to adopt instead a course more effectual than the most flagrant rudeness. I would simply grow completely unobtrusive of the tender exactions, the shrinking, yet enormous, requirements of budding love.

I was not, perhaps, so entirely callous as it seemed to my interest to appear. It gave me a qualm or two to boldly approach the tennis-court on three consecutive mornings and suggest that we play a few sets of doubles—Jeannette and I against David and Delice. An almost irresistible impulse to take to my heels when I perceived the injured resignation of their faces was conquered only by noticing that Delice was standing at the extreme edge of the court, like some winged figure tiptoe for flight, and with an expression of abject apology upon her face.

I realized from her attitude that nothing but the most dogged resolution on my part would save the day, and I played on and on and on, in no way discouraged by the limp aid vouchsafed me by Jeannette.

Rallies so languid, serves so feeble, and play in general so thoroughly uninterested, it has rarely been my lot to endure in a game of tennis. As for David, he on his part appeared to have been bereft suddenly of the power to move with even moderate rapidity. It was indeed perplexing to see two such splendid players as those two usually were degenerate so suddenly into such a pair of duffers. Delice (let us pause to lay a laurel leaf upon the penetration of the female sex) appeared to fully understand their behavior, and though she could not but see that I was acting for the best, she said I was a wretch.

I was. For four mornings I devoted my entire time and the greater part of Delice's to making things sociable for my eldest sister and her prospective fiancé, with the result that the fifth morn-



Elinor Sitting on the
Wall, and John Like
a Worm in the Dust

ing they borrowed my golf clubs and set off, rather huffily, for the links, and the court that had known them knew them no more.

Nor were my afternoons idle. After assiduously playing tennis every morning, I took occasion to announce each day at luncheon that Delice and I would be needing the automobile in the afternoon. The first day I felt distinctly uncomfortable, and my tone had the deferential inflection of one who seeks a favor from the powers that be. John's manner, however, put me entirely at my ease.

"Why, certainly, old man," he said with easy kindness. "Nell and I can hire one from Murphy's for the afternoon."

I had to bite my tongue to keep myself from thanking him for the loan of my own machine. The six of them had so ground Delice and me under the heel of their oppression that our sense of our own rights and privileges had dwindled almost to the vanishing point.

He and Elinor did not hire a machine that afternoon, I afterward learned, but mooned disconsolately around the place instead, and when I mentioned the next day that Delice and I were preparing for another spin their annoyance was really visible—so much so that Delice was almost reduced to tears, and besought me to let them have the automobile. She said she was getting perfectly miserable about the way I was behaving, and she didn't know what they would think.

But I wanted them to do some thinking, so I remained serene.

The third day John went down to Murphy's and hired a machine. I presume it was the best they had to offer, but it must have seemed odd after my beauty. We passed them going over, and the thing was apparently proceeding by jerks and gasps, with a weird asthmatic wheeze and a most abominable smell. They did not show up at the Country Club at all, and when we came back, along about dark, we came upon them at the foot of Dyckman's Hill, Elinor sitting on the stone wall, and John, like a worm in the dust, investigating the vital parts of his machine from underneath.

We offered to take Elinor in with us or to send a tow out for them; but they refused, and their tones gave us to understand that although they were somewhat reduced in circumstances they were not yet fallen so low as to associate with

two monsters like ourselves.

At this I am sure that the heart of Delice turned to the consistency of pulp within her, and that she would willingly have changed places with them and patiently perched upon the wall while I groveled in the dust. Anticipating some such offer on her part, I started off toward home at a pretty good speed, and her expressions of solicitous regret were borne back to them by the wind.

I am fully aware that I must be appearing in rather a poor light, and am almost growing sensitive about confessing that my machinations were getting to be of the continuous-performance order; but my odd moments during this entire week were occupied to the fullest in making myself agreeable to Burgess and Laura. At all such times as I was not playing tennis with David and Jeannette, or making away from John and Elinor in the automobile, I was endeavoring to enter into and share the pleasures of Burgess and Laura in a manner that was so attentive and whole-souled that their lives were ren-

dered miserable in consequence.

"O Love, for you the skies are blue!" sang Laura in her beautiful contralto voice, of which we are all so proud.

"Exactly so," said I to myself in the hall without; "but why not also have them a little bit blue on Delice's account and mine?"

With this reflection, I pushed open the drawing-room door and went boldly in. Burgess was leaning with both arms on the piano and apparently sighing his heart out to his lady as I entered.

I sat down peacefully upon a puffy satin sofa and remarked that the song was admirably adapted to Laura's voice, and that I loved to hear her sing, neither of which statements, though both were true, appeared to be pleasing. Laura left off singing and took to running her fingers up and down the keys in long squeaky scales; then she said the room was awfully hot and she was going out. Burgess treated me to something that had a strong family likeness to a scowl, and followed her. Now, solitude, as a usual thing, is dear to my soul; but on this occasion I found the room hot too, and as I am not fond of sitting upon satin sofas I went out after them.

I found them in a retired corner of the conservatory, and with a view to interesting them called their attention to some rare African cacti I had got lately. Had the plants been anything else than cacti, they would have shriveled to the root beneath the glance Laura cast at them. She muttered something which sounded like "Persecution!" and swept out in so stately a manner that the tail of her gown knocked over three geranium slips and an azalea as she went; and Delice, who apparently had had her suspicions of me, came in and lectured me until I came within an ace of giving up my struggle for the home which I felt should be my kingdom.

As I mentioned a few minutes ago, I was beginning to be a little bit ashamed of myself anyway, and with Delice encouraging me to consider myself a wretch I can't help acknowledging that I might have become weak enough to abandon a course that really was not proving entirely agreeable to a person whose whole previous training had tended to a polite consideration for those about him. But just at this moment of wavering I had some